

# The Monitor

## Summer 2014

Dear Readers,

This edition of *The Monitor* covers our office's activities from late March to June. *The Monitor* is a way for us to keep you informed about our work in the office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. Please click [here](#) to view previous copies of *The Monitor*.


This past spring was an especially busy travel period for our office, as we planned numerous trips to countries ranging from Greece to Ukraine. This edition of the *Monitor* provides details on the people with whom I met and the meetings and conferences that I attended.

For more regular updates, you can follow me on Twitter (@SEASForman) where I comment on the latest developments around the world (see page 10).

Thank you for your continued interest and support of our work.

Best wishes,

Ira Forman

 [www.state.gov/j/drl/seas](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/seas)



State Department Photo

## **In this Issue**

### **Overseas and Domestic Trips** **3.**

Greece

France

Italy and the Vatican

Ukraine

Estonia

Turkey

New York

Connecticut

### **At the Department of State** **8.**

Meeting with the World Jewish Congress

Meeting with the Chief Rabbi Bleich of Ukraine

Meeting with Coexister

Ukraine Conference Call

Meetings with Foreign Government Officials

Quarterly Meeting with Representatives of Jewish Organizations

### **On Capitol Hill** **9.**

Meeting with Congressman Deutch

Helsinki Commission Briefing

### **Events** **10.**

Briefing with United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

American Jewish Committee Global Forum

Anti-Defamation League's Global Survey on Anti-Semitism

### **Interviews** **11.**

Jewish News One

### **Training** **11.**

Foreign Service Institute

### **Online Outreach** **12.**

## Overseas and Domestic Trips

### Trip to Greece



In Athens, with, from L-R: President Samuel Matsas of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Deputy Chief of Mission Virginia Bennett (who will soon return to America to serve as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor), President Benjamin Albalas of the Central Board of Jewish Communities, and Ambassador Arye Mekel of Israel. (State Department Photo)

The Greek Jewish community may be small, but few societies can match its ancient history and diverse heritage. Yet, the continued presence of the deeply anti-Semitic and violent Golden Dawn party as well as the prevalence of conspiracy theories in Greek society creates problems for this community. While in Greece (March 27-30), I met with Jewish community leaders, government officials, and educators to learn about the various challenges anti-Semitism poses throughout the country.

My trip began with a visit in Athens, which hosts the largest Jewish community in Greece. While there, I met with representatives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. At the center of our conversation was the issue of countering the extremist views espoused by the Golden Dawn party, the social and economic dislocation that results from a 28% national unemployment rate and a drop in GDP by 25%, as well as how to ensure that Greece continues to be a welcoming home to its Jewish citizens. In addition to attending a round-table discussion with NGOs committed to countering racism and bigotry, I also met with Jewish leaders in Athens to discuss the challenges they face. During this meeting, Benjamin Albalas, the President of the Central Board of Jewish Communities, noted that the prolonged economic crisis has had a lasting, negative impact on Greek Jews. Minos Moisses, President of the Jewish Community of Athens, also expressed a similar sentiment by citing the many financial obligations facing the struggling Jewish community. I ended my stay in Athens by attending Shabbat services in the beautiful Beth Shalom Sephardic Synagogue and enjoying a Shabbat dinner at the nearby Chabad restaurant.

Next, I visited Ioannina, where I attended a ceremony to commemorate the March 1944 deportation of the city's Jewish citizens. Ioannina, which boasts an ancient walled city (with an old Romaniote synagogue), is nestled next to a lake and surrounded by snowcapped mountains. The city was once a center of [Romaniote](#) Jewish life, and, by tradition, it is believed that the Ioannina community was founded by Jews who were being carried off to be slaves before they were shipwrecked on the coast of Greece following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. However, other Romaniotes trace their roots in Ioannina to hundreds of years even before these events. The Greek Romaniote community (like the much larger Sephardic community) was decimated in the Holocaust and there are now fewer than fifty Jews in Ioannina, many of whom are elderly. The Romaniote Jews, who are neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardic, for many years spoke Judeo-Greek and today still maintain a unique Jewish culture.

Thessaloniki was my last stop in Greece. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the city's population was mainly Jewish, composed mostly of Sephardic Jews whose ancestors were refugees from 1492 Spain. The story of this thriving city and its Jews is remembered at the city's Jewish Museum, which, together with the Jewish Museum in Athens, is a rich depository of Greek Jewish culture and history. I met with academics who have been instrumental in the creation of a Jewish Studies Department at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. We also had the chance to explore opportunities to reach out to the important Greek Orthodox Church in the task of countering anti-Semitism.

Overall, from my time in Greece, I learned that the Golden Dawn party is not the only source of Greek anti-Semitism. During my trip, I learned that many in Greece are willing to believe conspiracy theories and, as a result, there are 29 different editions of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" which circulate in Greece.

### **Trip to France**

During my brief trip to Paris, March 31-April 1, I had the opportunity to sit in on, and present to, a meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Jewish Congress (WJC). The meeting was chaired by WJC President Ronald S. Lauder. The speakers at the meeting included Jacques Attali, former National Security Advisor to the French President François Mitterand and Founding President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Robert Singer, CEO and EVP of the WJC. Other speakers included the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary, the President of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, the Minister of the Interior of France, and the Ambassador of Israel to France. Though I attended to update WJC on the findings of our office over the last year, I found it particularly useful to hear from a diverse group of Jewish leaders about the nature of anti-Semitism in each of their respective countries.

### **Trip to Italy and the Vatican**

I spent April 30 in Rome with Rabbi Jack Bemporad of the Center for Interreligious Understanding and Ambassador Kenneth F. Hackett, our Ambassador to the Holy See. While at the Vatican, I also met with Cardinal Kurt Koch, of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and Father Norbert Hoffmann, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission

for Religious Relations with the Jews. We discussed ways in which we can collectively combat anti-Semitism as well as the problems facing Christian communities in the Middle East. We further discussed [our trip last year](#) to Auschwitz with a group of international imams and Muslim scholars. I also visited the well-known NGO Sant'Egidio to discuss the Vatican's current efforts to combat discrimination against minority religious communities.

### **Trip to Ukraine**



With the Chief Rabbi of Dnipropetrovsk, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetsky. (State Department Photo)

On May 14-17 I travelled to Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk in the wake of stories of anti-Semitic incidents in Ukraine during and after the revolution in Maidan Square. These anti-Semitic episodes included physical attacks on Jews, defacement of monuments, firebombing of synagogues, and pro-Russian figures charging right-wing nationalists and the new government in Kyiv with anti-Semitism. Thus, the purpose of my trip was two-fold; to meet with government officials to see how they are responding to these incidents, and, even more importantly, to meet with Jewish leaders from across the country to learn their take on the situation. In Dnipropetrovsk, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetsky, Chief Rabbi of Dnipropetrovsk, brought together Jewish leaders from the east and south of Ukraine, including Rabbi Nochurn Erentroi, Chief Rabbi of Zaporizhyya, to meet with me and share their experiences.

I also attended an Israel independence celebration at the Israeli Embassy in Kyiv. There, I had the opportunity to meet with a number of other Ukrainian Jewish leaders. Through our conversations, I found a near unanimous view that the recent anti-Semitic incidents in Ukraine were almost certainly provocations, and that Jewish leaders felt they were most likely coming from pro-Russian figures, not the government in Kyiv or even from right-wing nationalists who are concentrated in the west of Ukraine.

In addition, I met with several officials from the Ministry of Culture, the Dnipropetrovsk Deputy Governor, Boris Treigerman, and the Deputy Foreign Minister, Danylo Lubkivsky. Unlike my meetings in Ukraine last year before the Maidan demonstrations when the previous government's officials argued there was no anti-Semitism in Ukraine, the new government's officials acknowledged the problem and pledged to investigate and prosecute. These leaders also argued

that the new Ukraine should be a welcoming home for all minorities. For further information on my trip to Ukraine, please read my blog post [\*Ukraine: A Tale of Two Trips\*](#).

### **Trip to Estonia**

From Kyiv, I travelled to Estonia. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, I met with leaders of the Estonian Jewish community, representatives from the Estonian government, and NGO officials, including Kari Käsper, the Executive Director of the Estonian Human Rights Centre, Mart Laanemäe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Under Secretary, Alla Jakobson, chair of the Jewish Community of Estonia, Amnon-Juzef Luvistsuk, Director of the Estonian Jewish Museum, Andres Kasekamp, of the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, and Igor Lirisman, director of the Tallinn Jewish School. With government officials, I was briefed on efforts by Russian backed organizations to charge the Tallinn government with anti-Semitism. I, in turn, assured these officials that our office feels it is important to speak out and protest when false charges of anti-Semitism are made. With our Estonian hosts, we also discussed the role of Estonians in World War II and the importance of confronting historical facts—including the role of the Estonian Waffen SS. As noted, I met with members of the Estonian Jewish community who informed me of their strong relations with the government in Tallinn and argued that there is little anti-Semitism in modern Estonia.

### **Trip to Turkey**



Surrounded by Jewish leaders and directors of the Jewish Hospital in Istanbul. (State Department Photo)

My next stop on my May trip was Turkey (May 20-23). In recent years, the Turkish Jewish community has shrunk to 17,000 members (most of whom reside in Istanbul). Against a backdrop of ongoing efforts to normalize Turkish-Israeli ties, I was particularly anxious to assess the Jewish community's status. Right before we reached Istanbul, I was informed that my meetings in Ankara with Turkish government officials were cancelled because of the press of business in the wake of the massive Soma mining disaster which killed 301 people. I was disheartened to see that a headline in a major newspaper claimed that the son-in-law of the Soma



mine owner is Jewish and implying that Israel and Jewish media are somehow behind the current criticism of Turkey.

As in Greece, the Turkish Jewish community has a history stretching back well before the Common Era. Though the community is small, it still operates some 25 synagogues in Istanbul including at least one that was built during Byzantine rule. Though some members of the community with whom I met told me that their children will not return to Turkey after their university studies abroad, I also met many others who are committed to maintaining a vibrant Jewish community—even in the face of conspiracy theories that implicate Israel and the world-wide Jewish community. My meetings included Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, the President of the Jewish Community of Turkey, Rifat Bali, a prominent academic who has published books about anti-Semitism in Turkey, Pinar Dost-Niyego, an academic who conducts Holocaust education for high school teachers, and Ishak Alaton, a longtime leading figure within Turkey's Jewish community.

### **Trip to New York**

On June 12, I attended the Second Annual Jewish Communal Security Leadership Summit. There, I participated in a discussion entitled “Examining the Diaspora Security Environment: Potential Implications for the U.S.” Other speakers during the conference included Paul Goldenberg, the National Director of Secure Community Network, Malcolm Hoenlein, Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and SCN Co-Chair, and John Cohen, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis and Counterterrorism Coordinator at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. While in New York, I also met with Andrew Srulevitch, the director of European affairs for the Anti-Defamation League, and Mark Weitzman, the Simon Wiesenthal Center Task Force Director.

### **Trip to Connecticut**

On June 26, I participated on a panel at Yale University where I was joined by Roya Hakakian, a fellow at Yale University's Whitney Humanities Center and a founding member of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center; the discussion was moderated by Rabbi James E. Ponet, Lecturer in Law at Yale Law School and the Howard M. Holtzmann Jewish Chaplain at Yale. On this panel, I explained how criticism of Israel can sometimes morph into anti-Semitism, our goal to relieve pressure from struggling Jewish communities, and our concern about how circumcision bans may negatively impact Jewish communities. I further explained the importance for governments to confront their respective country's history in order to better combat anti-Semitism. A video of the discussion can be found [here](#).

## **At the Department of State**

### **Meeting with the World Jewish Congress**

On March 12, Uzra Zeya, Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and I met with representatives from the World Jewish Congress (WJC) to discuss our shared priorities regarding Human Rights and combating anti-Semitism. We focused on the status of the Jewish community in Ukraine.

In addition to asking about our bureau's focus on human rights abuses in Iran, and our work to empower civil society efforts, WJC leaders requested that we pay attention to human rights issues in Indonesia and Malaysia.

### **Meeting with Rabbi Yaakov Bleich of Ukraine**

On March 25, I met with Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, who has served as Chief Rabbi of Ukraine since 1990. During our meeting, we discussed the recent upheaval in Ukraine and Crimea and its overall impact on the safety of Jewish communities. Rabbi Bleich expressed his concerns about the rise in recent anti-Semitic acts in Ukraine, and he stated that these actions appear to be provocations which were instigated by pro-Russian elements in Ukraine.

### **Meeting with Coexister**

On April 16, I met with a group of French interfaith students from the youth-run organization [Coexister](#). These students participated on an Interfaith Tour where they travelled to forty countries and engaged with more than 300 people in interfaith dialogue and discussed their efforts to combat religious prejudice and discriminations. Coexister connects young interfaith activists through dialogue, solidarity, outreach, training, and study trips.

### **Ukraine Conference Call**

On May 7, I joined Rabbi Bleich of Kyiv on a conference call sponsored by Agudath Israel of America to discuss the threat of anti-Semitism in Ukraine. On this call, we discussed reports of anti-Semitic incidents in that country since the beginning of the year. At that time, there were a number of reports (particularly in the Russian language media) that accused the then new central government in Kyiv of encouraging and engaging in anti-Semitic acts.



### **Meetings with Foreign Government Officials**

A large part of our office's role at the Department of State involves building relationships and partnerships with other government officials. Over the past few months, I have met with Sophia Philippidou, the Greek Deputy Chief of Mission to the United States, Ambassador Manuel Sager of Switzerland, Member of Parliament David Anderson of Canada, Minister of Public Diplomacy Noam Katz of Israel, Ambassador Belen Alfaro of Spain, Ambassador Christos Panagopoulos of Greece, and Ambassador Andris Razans of Latvia.

### **Quarterly Meeting with Representatives of Jewish Organizations**

On June 25, I briefed representatives of major Jewish organizations on my recent activities and travels. Topics of discussion included the worsening of anti-Semitism in Europe, particularly the recent physical attacks against Jews in Belgium, France, and Germany; concern about gains by far right parties in recent European Parliamentary and Hungarian elections; and actions we can take now to combat the rise of anti-Semitism, including education efforts.

### **On Capitol Hill**

#### **Meeting with Congressman Deutch**

On March 12, I met with Congressman Ted Deutch to discuss the current state of anti-Semitism in Europe and the Middle East. During our meeting, I shared our top priorities: combatting the threat of circumcision bans in Nordic countries and protecting vulnerable Jewish communities in Europe. Prior to concluding our meeting, we discussed the potential for re-creating a congressional caucus on anti-Semitism. Most recently, Congressman Deutch openly discussed the issue of anti-Semitism in a piece in the [Palm Beach Post](#).

#### **Helsinki Commission Briefing**

On April 14, I briefed [Helsinki Commission](#) staff on issues facing Jewish communities in Europe. I discussed my concerns about efforts in the Nordic countries movement to ban circumcision, as well as efforts by other European actors to ban religious slaughter. I shared information about my recent trip to Greece, including my concerns about the Golden Dawn party and their anti-Semitic and racist rhetoric. I also outlined security concerns pertaining to Jewish communities in France, Greece, and Ukraine.

## **Events**

### **Briefing the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom**

On March 20, I briefed the [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's](#) (USCIRF) current Commissioners, providing an update on our latest activities and travels. In turn, we had the opportunity to hear their perspectives on the state of religious freedom in various parts of the globe. We also discussed recent events in Ukraine and Crimea.



With USCIRF Commissioners, from L-R: Sam Gejdenson, James Zogby, Elliott Abrams, and Katrina Lantos Swett

### **American Jewish Committee Global Forum**

On May 12, I attended the American Jewish Committee's (AJC) Global Forum and participated in a panel entitled "Banning Ritual Circumcision and Kosher Slaughter: A challenge to maintaining Jewish life." This discussion was moderated by Deidre Berger, the AJC's Berlin Director and a key figure in the successful passage of legislation in the German Bundestag overturning a court decision to ban circumcision. Other panelists were Jeremy Jones, Director of International and of Community Affairs in Australia and Israel and the Jewish Affairs Council, and Piotr Kadlick, President of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland.

Following the panel discussion, I met with Andras Heisler, President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary to discuss the recent controversies in Hungary over the 70<sup>th</sup> year commemoration of the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz.

While at the Global Forum, I also met with Ambassador Belen Alfaro of Spain, Julius Meini, head of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, and representatives from Confederación de Asociaciones Israelitas de Venezuela to talk about that country's rapidly shrinking community.

Perhaps the most eye-opening meeting was a discussion I had with young Jewish representatives from the Ukraine who spoke of what is happening in their communities.

### **Anti-Defamation League's Global Survey on Anti-Semitism**

On June 13, Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Rashad Hussain and I co-hosted a briefing for State Department colleagues on the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) recently published [Global 100 Index](#) of anti-Semitic attitudes in more than 100 countries. The ADL's Director of International Affairs, Michael Salberg, was the speaker, and he was accompanied by ADL's Washington Director of Government and National Affairs, Stacy Burdett. This session was an opportunity to learn more about the methodology and findings of this survey. Discussion and questions focused on how ADL devised their anti-Semitism index, the specific questions ADL used, cultural differences that may explain some of the survey's findings, and the high levels of anti-Semitic attitudes in the Middle East/North Africa region and certain European nations.

## **Interviews**

### **Jewish News One**

On March 20, I spoke with Jewish News One about the rise of anti-Semitic political parties in Hungary and Greece, the proposed Nordic bans on circumcision, and the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. We also discussed the impact of events in Ukraine on the Jewish communities in that country. A video of the interview can be found [here](#).

## **Training**

### **Foreign Service Institute**

One of our most important responsibilities is helping train our professional Foreign Service personnel on the nature of anti-Semitism. In late May, we presented a module on anti-Semitism during the Foreign Service Institute's bi-annual class on Religion and Foreign Policy. During these sessions, we not only provide basic information on the different forms of modern anti-Semitism, but we also try to role play and involve these State Department employees in the types of judgments and decisions we face every day.

## **Online Outreach**

 **Facebook.com/StateDRL**

Once you are signed into Facebook, search Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. The “Like” button is at the top of the page and has a thumbs-up symbol. The symbol disappears once you have “Liked” the page.

### **State.gov**

I also encourage all of you to visit our page <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/seas/index.htm> on the Department of State’s website. You can also connect via the homepage of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) <http://www.state.gov/j/drl> and then click on

“Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism” in the left vertical column. Here you will find information about our office, as well as remarks, press releases, past issues of *The Monitor*, and photos.

**HumanRights.gov** 

You can also visit HumanRights.gov, which is the U.S. government’s official website for international human rights related information.

  
**Twitter.com**

Please also follow me on Twitter. You can find me at: @SEASForman